

## Loughborough and Other Developments



One year ago, what names would have come to a non-Canadian's mind had he or she been questioned about Canadian children's authors? Probably L.M. Montgomery, Roderick Haig-Brown, Farley Mowat, James Houston, Jean Little. Perhaps Leslie McFarlane--he who, under the name Franklin W. Dixon, wrote the Hardy Boys books, at least the first 16 and numbers 22-26. But only in a very few (if any) instances would the names of Ruth Nichols, Charles Roberts, Ernest Thompson Seton, Claude Aubry, Morley Callaghan, Dennis Lee, and many other Canadian children's writers have been mentioned.

It was in part to overcome this lack of knowledge, to show what was happening in Canada, to share with others the richness and concerns of our children's literature, that the Loughborough International Seminar was held in Toronto last August with a focus on children's literature in Canada. The organizing committee did its work well, and the Seminar was quite successful. Over one hundred selected participants from many nations joined in discussion of the topic papers; all--including Canadians--learned something. The Seminar was a landmark in the growing national and international recognition of our literature.

Because *Canadian Children's Literature* recognized the importance of the Seminar and the wider audience which would be interested in the discussion papers, we made arrangements to publish them. This issue is the result; it includes most of the articles delivered. Space and consequent cost considerations prohibited inclusion of some material, so a few items less relevant to the needs of our Canadian readers had to be omitted. However, in order to disseminate and promote international knowledge about our children's literature, *CCL* is distributing (at our own expense) a copy of this issue to each of the Loughborough participants.

The first article included herein deals with early materials of Canadian relevance in Toronto's Osborne Collection of Early Children's Books. Subsequent to these comments on the past by Miss St. John, Head of the Collection, Claude Aubry discusses the problems of present Canadian authors--especially but not exclusively within the Quebec context. M. Aubry is followed by two fellow creative writers: Ruth Nichols and Dennis Lee. The former--a prize winning author of fantasy novels who recently completed her Ph.d. in Religious Studies--examines the theory of fantasy especially in relation to so-called realism. The latter author, Lee, comments on his poetry for children and its relation to himself and to Canada as a place.

Articles by Alvine Bélisle and Mary Lou Fox Radulovich follow those of the creative writers. Ms Bélisle looks at aspects of the development of children's literature in Quebec; Ms Fox Radulovich brings an Ojibwe perspective to bear. Their papers are followed by a pair on illustration. Elizabeth Cleaver, our cover artist, discusses illustration as it relates to her own work, and Alan Suddon, also an illustrator, shows the importance of children's book illustration by tracing the effect Walter Crane's pictures had on the development of women's dress in Victorian times.

Together, these eight Canadians present an interesting and revealing cross-sectional view of our children's literature. Still, a post-script indicating some new things that have appeared in the field during the past year or so might also be useful, especially to non-Canadian readers.

In terms of criticism and review, there are two new sources. One, of course, is *CCL* itself; the other is the revised edition of Sheila Egoff's *Republic of Childhood: A Critical Guide to Canadian Children's Literature in English*. This new edition adds separate sections on poetry, plays, picture-books and Eskimo legends, reorganizes much material, corrects certain previous judgments, and updates the list of works discussed. <sup>1</sup>As for *CCL*, our previous issue (#3) was a special on L.M. Montgomery's work, and one of our projects for the upcoming year is an issue on Canadian children's drama, which is experiencing an upsurge, especially in regard to plays stressing audience interaction with the actors.

In addition to works of criticism, two useful anthologies have appeared. The 1976 number of *Canadian Children's Annual* is carrying on--in Canadian terms--the tradition of English annuals. As well, *Kanata*, an anthology of Canadian children's literature compiled by Mary Rubio and Glenys Stow, presents 38 selections of prose, poetry and song by writers such as Dennis Lee, Jean Little, Sheila Burnford, James Houston, Robert Service, Roderick Haig-Brown, Shizuye Takashima, and L.M. Montgomery.

A third area of new activity is magazines for Canadian children. One is *Owl*--which stands for *Outdoor and Wild Life*--a children's magazine published by the Young Naturalist Foundation. *Owl* stresses interest in wildlife and the environment, and hopes to encourage an understanding of the interdependence of all living things. It includes nature-related articles, comics, games, pictures, puzzles, and things to make--as well as a children's question and answer section. Evolved from its predecessor, *The Young Naturalist* magazine, *Owl* is 32 pages long and will begin regular publication--the two issues published so far are prototypes--in September. The other magazine for Canadian children is somewhat prosaically--but descriptively--titled *Canadian Children's Magazine*; stemming from British Columbia, its first issue is hot off the presses and will be distributed soon.

<sup>1</sup>A good complement to Egoff--appearing at the last possible moment for inclusion in this issue of *CCL*--is Irma McDonough's *Canadian Books for Children*, an annotated selection of some 1400 books in print. Also, the new books, magazines, and comics mentioned below will be discussed in more detail in subsequent issues of *CCL*.

In a class of its own is the revival of the Canadian comic-book. Canadian comics--which died soon after the war's end when removal of import barriers led to a huge influx of U.S. comics--have risen from the ashes: there are now quite successful book-form comics on *The History of Quebec* and on *Norman Bethune*. There is also a real Canadian comic-book hero: Captain Canuck. He is a special agent for the Canadian International Security Organization (non-existent in reality, to reassure those fearing shades of the C.I.A.), and his job, in the 1990s, is to prevent threats to Canada and to world peace. He's not a typical hero: he stops to pray before going into battle, he refuses to use excessive force, and--according to his creators, Richard Comely and Ron Leishman--he is not going to be used to exploit sex. Nationalistic but world-peacekeeper, religious, not too violent, and more concerned with ethical duty than sexual exploitation: Captain Canuck. In short, as his name implies, Canuck combines a number of Canadian stereotypes--regardless of their validity or invalidity--into a single (and not super) hero.

A final point which should be mentioned is the activity of book publishers, both in English and in French. In spite of the financial obstacles to publishing children's books for a small Canadian market, some very high-quality works are appearing. Particularly notable are the appointment of children's editors by various publishers and the large number of Canadian children's books appearing in paperback, especially from Scholastic-Tab. Also suggestive of the industry's growing confidence is the increased marketing efforts directed outside Canada. Perhaps, as time goes on, the success of our authors and illustrators will find its counterpart in the economic health of the publishers.

*JOHN R. SORFLEET*